

Booklist of American nonfiction authors

1. *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup
This unforgettable memoir was the basis for the Academy Award-winning film *12 Years a Slave*. This is the true story of Solomon Northup, who was born and raised as a freeman in New York. He lived the American dream, with a house and a loving family—a wife and two kids. Then one day he was drugged, kidnapped, and sold into slavery in the deep south. These are the true accounts of his twelve hard years as a slave; many believe this memoir is even more graphic and disturbing than the film. His extraordinary journey proves the resiliency of hope and the human spirit despite the most grueling and formidable of circumstances.
2. *Meet You in Hell: Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the Bitter Partnership That Changed America* by Les Standiford
Two founding fathers of American industry. One's desire to dominate business at any price. The author of *Last Train to Paradise* tells the riveting story of Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the bloody steelworkers' strike that transformed their fabled partnership into a furious rivalry. Set against the backdrop of the Gilded Age, *Meet You in Hell* captures the majesty and danger of steel manufacturing, the rough-and-tumble of the business world, and the fraught relationship between "the world's richest man" and the ruthless coke magnate to whom he entrusted his companies. The result is an extraordinary work of popular history. Also available as a Random House AudioBook and an eBook
3. *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* by David von Drehle
"Sure to become the definitive account of the fire. . . . Triangle is social history at its best, a magnificent portrayal not only of the catastrophe but also of the time and the turbulent city in which it took place." —*The New York Times* Book Review
Triangle is a poignantly detailed account of the 1911 disaster that horrified the country and changed the course of twentieth-century politics and labor relations. On March 25, 1911, as workers were getting ready to leave for the day, a fire broke out in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in New York's Greenwich Village. Within minutes it spread to consume the building's upper three stories. Firemen who arrived at the scene were unable to rescue those trapped inside: their ladders simply weren't tall enough. People on the street watched in horror as desperate workers jumped to their deaths. The final toll was 146 people—123 of them women. It was the worst disaster in New York City history. Triangle is a vibrant and immensely moving account that Bob Woodward calls, "A riveting history written with flare and precision."
4. *Imprisoned: The Betrayal of Japanese Americans During World War II* by Martin W. Sandler.
During World War II, a government rounded up an entire race of people and imprisoned them behind barbed wire and armed guards. It wasn't Germany. Don't count on what you learned in school about American history. We don't always want to admit our mistakes.
5. *They Called Themselves the K.K.K.: The Birth of an American Terrorist Group* by Susan Campbell Bartoletti
We sometimes wish we could brush some of our history under a rug and try to forget it. We know we shouldn't, but sometimes our history hurts too much. The Ku Klux Klan is one of our darkest, most terrifying memories. Men draped in sheets riding through the night to terrorize the innocent is the stuff of horror films and nightmares. Do yourself a favor and shine a light on those memories with Susan Campbell Bartoletti's *They Called Themselves the K.K.K.*

6. *The Devil in the White City* by Erik Larson
Want kids to pay attention to lessons about the turn of the century and the 1893 World's Fair? Throw a serial killer in there—and don't worry, he was there already. Larson's acclaimed and highly novelistic book follows the lives of Daniel H. Burnham, the fair's architect, and H.H. Holmes, the serial killer who used it as his playground, with special appearances from folks like Susan B. Anthony and Thomas Edison. In our experience, it is un-put-downable.
7. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
This is already a classic work of nonfiction in high school classrooms, so we thought we'd just reinforce the idea here—everyone should read Angelou's beautiful, heartbreaking coming of age story, whether you need a little push towards self-actualization and inner strength (as teenagers often do) or not.
8. *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer
This book may have slightly less impact on those not living in snowy climes themselves, but we recommend it anyway. Krakauer is a master of the general interest narrative nonfiction style, and this book is our favorite of his oeuvre, following the story of Chris McCandless as he abandoned everything he knew to hike in Alaska, surviving on almost nothing for months until he finally succumbed to the winter. This book has a special quality for teenagers—or at least it did for us when we were among them — dealing as it does with the urge for separation from society, independence, and the fearsome capabilities of a young person on a mission.
9. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou
I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings is a 1969 autobiography about the early years of African-American writer and poet Maya Angelou. The first in a seven-volume series, it is a coming-of-age story that illustrates how strength of character and a love of literature can help overcome racism and trauma. The book begins when three-year-old Maya and her older brother are sent to Stamps, Arkansas, to live with their grandmother and ends when Maya becomes a mother at the age of 16. In the course of *Caged Bird*, Maya transforms from a victim of racism with an inferiority complex into a self-possessed, dignified young woman capable of responding to prejudice.
10. *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Houston, James D. Houston
Jeanne Wakatsuki was seven years old in 1942 when her family was uprooted from their home and sent to live at Manzanar internment camp—with 10,000 other Japanese Americans. Along with searchlight towers and armed guards, Manzanar ludicrously featured cheerleaders, Boy Scouts, sock hops, baton twirling lessons and a dance band called the Jive Bombers who would play any popular song except the nation's #1 hit: "Don't Fence Me In." *Farewell To Manzanar* is the true story of one spirited Japanese American family's attempt to survive the indignities of forced detention . . . and of a native-born American child who discovered what it was like to grow up behind barbed wire in the United States.
11. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot
Her name was Henrietta Lacks, but scientists know her as HeLa. She was a poor black tobacco farmer whose cells—taken without her knowledge in 1951—became one of the most important tools in medicine, vital for developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping, and more. Henrietta's cells have been bought and sold by the billions, yet she remains virtually unknown, and her family can't afford health insurance. This phenomenal New York Times bestseller tells a riveting story of the collision between ethics, race, and medicine; of scientific discovery and faith healing; and of a daughter consumed with questions about the mother she never knew.
12. *Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass* by Fredrick Douglass
Born into a family of slaves, Frederick Douglass educated himself through sheer determination. His unconquered will to triumph over his circumstances makes his one of America's best and most unlikely success stories. Douglass' own account of his journey from slave to one of America's great statesmen, writers, and orators is as fascinating as it is inspiring.

13. *Battle Cry of Freedom* by James M. McPherson

Battle Cry of Freedom covered two decades, the period from the outbreak of the [Mexican-American War](#) to the [Civil War's](#) ending at [Appomattox](#). Thus, it examined the Civil War era, not just the war, as it combined the social, military and political events of the period within a single narrative framework. One reviewer commends McPherson for initially describing "the republic at midcentury" as "a divided society, certainly, and a violent one, but not one in which so appalling a phenomenon as civil war is likely. So it must have seemed to most Americans at the time. Slowly, slowly the remote possibility became horrible actuality; and Mr. McPherson sees to it that it steals up on his readers in the same way."^[1]

A central concern of this work is the multiple interpretations of [freedom](#). In an interview, McPherson claimed: "Both sides in the Civil War professed to be fighting for the same "freedoms" established by the [American Revolution](#) and the [Constitution](#) their forefathers fought for in the Revolution—individual freedom, [democracy](#), a [republican](#) form of government, [majority rule](#), free [elections](#), etc. For Southerners, the Revolution was a war of secession from the tyranny of the [British Empire](#), just as their war was a war of secession from Yankee tyranny. For Northerners, their fight was to sustain the government established by the Constitution with its guaranties of rights and liberties."

14. *The Jungle* by Upton Sinclair (**FICTION**; 2001 edition; call F SIN)

The Jungle is a 1906 novel written by the American journalist and novelist Upton Sinclair (1878–1968). Sinclair wrote the novel to portray the harsh conditions and exploited lives of immigrants in the United States in Chicago and similar industrialized cities. However, most readers were more concerned with his exposure of health violations and unsanitary practices in the American meatpacking industry during the early 20th century, based on an investigation he did for a socialist newspaper.

The book depicts working class poverty, the lack of social supports, harsh and unpleasant living and working conditions, and a hopelessness among many workers. These elements are contrasted with the deeply rooted corruption of people in power. A review by the writer Jack London called it, "the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of wage slavery."

Sinclair had spent seven weeks gathering information while working incognito in the meatpacking plants of the Chicago stockyards for the newspaper. It was published as a book on February 26, 1906, by Doubleday and in a subscribers' edition. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Jungle)

15. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: An Indian History of the American West is a 1970 book by American writer Dee Brown that covers the history of Native Americans in the American West in the late nineteenth century. The book expresses a Native American perspective on the actions of the US government which are described as a series of injustices and betrayals. Brown describes Native Americans' displacement through forced relocations and years of warfare waged by the United States federal government. The government's dealings are portrayed as a continuing effort to destroy the culture, religion, and way of life of Native American peoples.

Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was first published in 1970 to generally strong reviews. Published at a time of increasing American Indian activism, the book has never gone out of print and has been translated into 17 languages. The title is taken from the final phrase of a twentieth-century poem titled "American Names" by Stephen Vincent Benet. The full quotation, "I shall not be there/I shall rise and pass/Bury my heart at Wounded Knee," appears at the beginning of Brown's book.^[6] Although Benet's poem is not about the plight of Native Americans, Wounded Knee was the location of the last major confrontation between the US Army and Native Americans. It is also the vicinity of where Crazy Horse's parents buried his heart and some of his bones after his death in 1877. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bury_My_Heart_at_Wounded_Knee)